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TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: HAITI: DEFINING AN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA

SUMMARY

1. REO visited Embassy PAP November 20-21 to meet with officials from the Ministry of Environment (MOE), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank (WB) and the United National Development Program (UNDP). GOH and NGO representatives explained environmental problems and opportunities, and assessed projects carried out by other donors. Major challenges include limited resources, weak government capacity and ongoing security concerns.

2. NGO contacts identified integrated watershed management and disaster response/ risk management as top priorities. MOE officials focused on capacity building, natural resources degradation, protected areas management and urban waste management. WHO is building on its ongoing engagement on health issues like HIV to anchor new initiatives on avian influenza (AI) and chemical safety. Embassy PAP might consider engaging the Haitian government on ratifying the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); integrated watershed management; children's education; and debt relief. END SUMMARY.

3. REO visited Embassy PAP November 20-21 to discuss environmental priorities with MOE Director of Soil and Ecosystems Vernet Joseph; HIV and AI with WHO program Directors Paulo Fernando Teixeira and Vely Jean-Francois; disaster response with WB Coordinator for Environmental Programs Sylvio Etienne; watershed management with UNDP officials Arnold Dupuy, Ovidio Ibanez Lopez and Laura Lopez-Ortum Collado; and sustainable development with USAID Environment specialist Ben Swartley and Environment officer Lionel Poitevien. REO also met with acting DCM Jay Smith.

Haitian Environmental Priorities

4. With the new government in place for less than a year, the MOE is in the early stages of developing an environmental agenda. When asked to identify the MOE's greatest needs, government and donor contacts consistently provided a variant on "everything." Soil and Ecosystem Director Joseph flagged the following priorities, which largely captured ongoing cooperation priorities with donors:

Priority 1: Building Capacity

5. According to Joseph, one of the GOH's environmental priorities is to strengthen the MOE's capacity to implement environmental policy. The MOE faces the challenge of ensuring that more established ministries take environmental priorities, particularly Haiti's obligations under international law, into account. For example, Joseph doubted that Customs officials were aware of the paperwork needed to trade in endangered species, or their obligation to screen for ozone-depleting substances. The MOE and USAID are preparing a National Plan of Action on the Environment which will

provide a framework for implementing environmental policy objectives.

Priority 2: Halting the Degradation of Natural Resources

¶6. GOH and NGO officials recognized that deforestation is an obstacle to Haiti's development and a threat to biodiversity. Joseph emphasized its impact on agriculture (soil degradation and loss), rural availability of water, and fishing (water siltation). Reservoir silting also reduces production of hydroelectricity, increasing reliance on fossil fuels for energy production. The WB allotted USD 12 million for civil protection (disaster early warning system), reforestation, and disaster management in coordination with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). UNDP, Canada, Spain and the U.S. plan to adopt key river basins to promote integrated watershed management and address disaster risks. These projects emphasize community-led development, with key duties farmed out to municipal/local stakeholders. The projects will encourage consolidation of local government and grassroots democracy by stimulating local action in target watersheds to reconcile the concerns of both downstream economic interests (farmers or bottlers, for example) and riverine communities who face diminished access to fresh water and heightened exposure to natural hazards.

¶7. According to UNDP officials Dupuy, Lopez and Collado, the organization anticipates sufficient coordination across donor agencies to generate a Haitian model for watershed management. Efforts in natural disaster risk mitigation, community-led watershed management and sustainable production might benefit from the expertise of Haitian geographical information system managers trained with European Union assistance.

¶8. Integrated watershed management could find valuable partners among private sector and NGO stakeholders. The WB is seeking support from NGOs for economic governance reform, stressing in particular anti-corruption, transparency and public participation. USAID and USDA/APHIS have worked for years with the formal sector to promote specialty organic and fair trade coffee, small-grower mango production, and sustainably produced cacao. REO encouraged interlocutors to consider White Water to Blue Water Partnership (www.ww2bw.org) precedents and partners in planning their projects.

Priority 3: Consolidating Protected Areas

¶9. Joseph noted that Haitian management of parks and protected areas needed to accommodate the communities that have since settled within park borders. Many parts of Haiti, including key watersheds in its central areas, have experienced deforestation, but USAID and UNDP representatives stressed that Haiti is not completely the treeless country of international perception. The southeast and southern peninsula pine forests are the best preserved of the wooded areas. Appropriate management of these areas could provide an opportunity for sustainable logging. In the north, the World Bank is looking to reforestation to help combat drought and desertification.

¶10. Both protected areas and natural resource conservation may benefit from the prospect of adventure tourism in Haiti. Although violence is an ongoing concern in Port au Prince, relative calm in rural areas has stirred a tentative interest in adventure tourism -- a solar-powered ecolodge is now open for business and Royal Caribbean is scouting out new opportunities for cruise ship visitors in northern Haiti. (Note: Econoff recently returned from a visit to Cap Haitien and noted that Royal Caribbean's Labadie tourist enclave, previously advertised as part of "Hispaniola," is now being marketed as Haiti. End note.)

Priorities 4 and 5: Urban Waste and Educational Outreach

¶11. Port-au-Prince's garbage could well be the most relentlessly visible environmental challenge facing the government. There are no recycling facilities in Haiti and only a handful of garbage trucks to service Port-au-Prince. (Note: The garbage trucks that currently

service Port-au-Prince are USAID-funded, but, at the Madrid Donor's Conference, the Venezuela government announced the donation of five additional garbage trucks. End note.) Garbage typically accumulates at key intersections across the city until a torrent of rain washes the trash away, or exasperated residents either burn it or hire a truck to haul it off. In addition, the city's sewage pours untreated into the Gulf of Gonave, rendering freshly caught fish a potential health hazard.

¶12. Joseph acknowledged MOE's responsibility in raising consciousness about environmental problems. His terse responses to questions from Emboffs on the subject, however, suggest little progress to date.

Constructive WHO Engagement on Human Health

¶13. According to WHO Project Chief Teixeira, the most dramatic success on the health front is the reduction of HIV prevalence from approximately 7 percent of Haiti's population at the height of the HIV crisis to 2.2 percent (UN AIDS 2006 statistics) in 2006 - an accomplishment achieved despite years of political instability. WHO officer Francois expressed satisfaction that Haiti had completed the development of an AI response plan that produced closer coordination among Health, Finance, Trade and Agriculture ministries. He appeared less sanguine however, that GOH ministries have the capacity to implement the plan if called upon. Francois said the likeliest vector for avian flu's appearance in Haiti is migratory birds. Other WHO projects include:

-- Boosting MOE's capacity to manage chemicals and to prepare a National Plan for Chemical Safety, which would focus primarily on labor practices.

-- Drafting an institutional analysis of the water sector, which would be used to identify pilot projects for investment.

Next Steps

¶14. Staffing levels and security concerns pose difficult challenges for incorporating environmental issues in the Embassy agenda. In general, the Embassy might use its authority to convoke key government officials and donor experts to discuss environment and health priorities. Tools such as the Embassy Science Fellows Program, the American Fellows Program, and video conferences could bring U.S. expertise to bear in support of programs carried out by USAID, UNDP, WHO and others. Some opportunities:

-- Haiti is the sole country in the Western Hemisphere (by REO's count) not party to CITES. Embassy PAP might consider whether the notional USAID plan to strengthen Customs could serve as an opportunity to educate key ministries about CITES, and lobby for Haitian ratification of the agreement. More generally, the USAID effort with Customs might take into account Green Customs (www.greencustoms.org) elements. (Note: REO noted that endangered hawksbill turtle products were being marketed to tourists at his Port au Prince hotel and at the Airport Duty Free stores. Haiti is not a party to CITES, but sale of hawksbill shell souvenirs to visitors from other countries risks exposing them to penalties on their arrival home. End note.)

-- The MOE's interest in integrated watershed management provides an opportunity to tap into the expertise of the White Water to Blue Water Partnership (www.ww2bw.org) for partners, precedents, and primers.

-- Haitian environmental education might benefit from the introduction of Project GLOBE (www.globe.gov) to the Ministries of Education and Environment. GLOBE is a USG-supported program to teach children how to use science to interpret changes in their environment. Schools in key watershed areas might be able to use GLOBE techniques in support of watershed management goals.

-- Debt relief mechanisms like the Tropical Forest Conservation Act can bring significant resources to bear in support of sustainable development and forest protection, respectively. To qualify, Haiti would need to demonstrate quality forests and meet certain economic

criteria. While some expect Haiti to benefit from outright loan forgiveness, post may wish to consider whether a debt swap could be an element of any debt forgiveness strategy.

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